Some of the individual chapters in Part One—notably, Statistical Surveys (Grebenik and Moser) and Experimental Studies of Small Groups (Argyle)—set out, succinctly and clearly, approaches and methods of study. In contrast, the chapter on operational research (Bailey), while giving numerous easily understood examples of the sort of problems that O.R. can tackle, is less clear about how it works or what distinguishes it from other "methods" or "approaches." It is difficult to see why the chapter on Sociology and History (Asa Briggs) was included in this section.

The second part of the book contains four subheadings—Industry, Social Pathology, Population Studies and Problems, and Aspects of Sociology, each part consisting of five or six chapters.

Inevitably, in a symposium of this sort, the quality of individual contributions is rather patchy. Chapters can be picked out that will serve ideally the public for whom the book is intended. Other chapters will prove to be confusing and perhaps confirm the impression that sociology still has a long way to go before it can claim the status of a science. Nancy Seear's chapter on Industrial Research and Cherns's on Industrial Accidents are among those that are models of concise reporting, and the latter raises enough points and gives enough references to stimulate the inquirer to go on with his inquiry. Some chapters, like Douglas's on Reproductive Loss, though excellent in themselves, seem to be curiously specialized in a book that aims to have such general appeal. The special appeal of this particular chapter is, however, likely to satisfy members of the Eugenics Society. Other chapters, on the other hand, are so general and so remote from practical application as to be likely to steer the inquirer away from the subject.

In short, the book is uneven. Its place is within the immediate reach of that student who is himself on the fringe of the subjects covered by the book or who is a specialist in one of them. A glance at the appropriate chapter and he may discover what is being talked and thought and done in the chosen field; what sort of publications were appearing a year or two ago, and what sort of trails he can follow. The editors must have known that they could never completely satisfy anybody. They may feel well satisfied, however, if they have provided a springboard from which many people will be able to discover what is important to them and how to proceed in any chosen direction.

H. G. MAULE

SEX AND SOCIETY

Comfort, Alex. *Sex in Society.* London, 1963. Duckworth. Pp. 172. Price 21s.

THE DUST JACKET of this volume—a fine photograph of Rodin's *Le Baiser*—arouses high hopes. Are we, one wonders, at last to be given a book which treats of sex as not only a biologically based activity of high societal significance, but also as mysteriously both expressing and generating love? As something earthy and lustful, and at the same time tender and protective, arousing and satisfying the senses whilst stimulating the imagination and enriching the emotions? The book that is needed would require an author who was a biologist and a sociologist and a poet: a rare combination indeed. But Dr. Comfort is one of the few who could fill the bill, so one opens the book with high hopes.

The hopes, alas, are not realized. This is not the book we have been waiting for. It lacks the fused precision and passion that is needed; it fails for lack of conviction; it temporizes and compromises; it is, in places, thoroughly pedestrian. Yet it is, in many ways, an excellent book—certainly better than most. The fact that one is disappointed is a reflection of unrealistic initial hopes. The fact that one dared to entertain those hopes is a great compliment to the one contemporary English author who might conceivably have fulfilled them.

With great clarity of social understanding, Dr. Comfort explains the difficulties of any dispassionate study of sex in contemporary Anglo-Saxon society, in a situation where unbiased data are hard to come by, social disapproval always just around the corner, and emotional tension all-pervading. In the absence of facts, he points out, poppycock flourishes—and how true that is! No longer so much the old poppycock about the alleged ill-effects of masturbation, but a progressive-sounding poppycock about sex as a highly spiritual *mystique*. And, the reviewer would add, a good deal of poppycock expressed

in the sort of social-survey study which pretends to describe (and even explain) sex in terms of statistical tables of frequency of orgasm.

Some readers may be shocked by the description of sexual intercourse as "the healthiest and most important human sport"; but the sudden exposure of a long-buried truth is usually shocking. Certainly, since such a minute proportion of all acts of human coition result in procreation, the orthodox acceptance of sexual pleasure as a mere sideline to the production of a family looks very thin, and one cannot dispute Dr. Comfort's assertion that "the chief biological function of coition is play." Like all play, it releases residual anxieties, provides opportunities for rôle-playing and, at times, for the harmless expression of aggression-feelings, and most importantly acts as a social cement. It is along these lines that sex must be explored if we are to extract an ethic in any way relevant to a world of easily available contraceptives.

It is good, too, to read a book with so balanced a view of the relative evils of fornication and fascism, of masturbation and mass murder, of adultery and the atom bomb. And it is difficult to resist Dr. Comfort's case, that western society to-day is so structured as to facilitate the rise to power of those individuals whose anti-sexuality tends to find expression in the organization of the sort of disguised martial law under which increasingly we live. But, if he is right, there nevertheless emerges one compensating glimmer of hope. Perhaps the tendency of young people to reject traditional morality, to be rather aggressively pro-sexual, may be producing not only social and moral problems, but also a generation more tolerant than ours, less inclined to cold-war fears and hates, unwilling to tolerate the organization of society for its own destruction. And, if so, we may—just possibly—hope for a joyous future.

A visionary development of this hope would have been fascinating, and a welcome change from the many prophecies of doom. Into it there might well have been worked Dr. Comfort's suggestions for education in sex play, for mate selection and so on. But Dr. Comfort the sociologist gets in the way of Dr. Comfort the poet—only, of course, where his sociology is suspect, for good poetry does not conflict with true fact. He can assert, for example, that "The institutionalism of modern societies knows only one incentive and one deterrent: fear," which is patently untrue. (He should submit himself more often to the television commercials, and learn how large a part is played also by appeals to pleasure, to self-esteem, to social standing and personal acceptability.) He makes exaggerated assertions such as "The public to whom an atrocity story is directed reacts primarily not by indignation, but by sexual excitement." He believes that "ninety-nine per cent of the rational . . . objections to free sexual intercourse at an early age" will disappear with advances in contraceptive technique. He even believes that the coining of the term "teenagers" had malign intent.

No—it's too dogmatic, too unbalanced, too inclined to escape the immense complexity and richness of human sexuality. The book is not what we so badly need, and what it might have been. But, like everything Dr. Comfort writes, it is fresh and honest and sensible and thought-provoking. It should be widely read.

CYRIL BIBBY